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ABSTRACT

The organization of culture and the language of gift-giving used by a university development office were studied using an ethnographic approach. Attention was directed to the way that an academic institution selects, designs, and expresses its written and oral fund-raising messages, as well as the variety of factors that precede, structure, and encourage gift-giving. The texts of the institution's fund-raising messages and the contexts in which they are stated were also analyzed. A seven-step process to structurally analyze academic fundraising messages was employed. Data were gathered that describe a university's fund-raising program and that consider their relationship to the larger institutional setting. The texts revealed that alumni, parents, and friends of an academic institution are considered responsible, dues-paying members of the academic family. Totemism, or the belief in kinship through a common affiliation, does operate in the academic community. The language and images were integral, recognizable parts of the institution's culture, and they were presented in texts in order to help the institution survive. Members of the academic faculty were called upon to give time and funds to help perpetuate the life of the institution. (SW)

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THE LANGUAGE OF REQUEST: ANNUAL GIFTGIVING TO THE UNIVERSITY

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This paper was presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education held at the Washington Hilton in Washington, D.C. March 25-26, 1983. This paper was reviewed by ASHE and was judged to be of high quality and of interest to others concerned with the research of higher education. It has therefore been selected to be included in the ERIC collection of ASHE conference papers.

The Language of Request: Annual Giftgiving to the University

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Persuasive explanation to potential and current donors of the institution's academic and fundraising objectives is the primary responsibility of the development office. My dissertation research will examine the organization of culture and the language of giftgiving used by a university development office. Specifically, this twelve-month ethnographic study will ask how does an academic institution select, design and express its written and oral fundraising messages?

The first goal of this study will be to increase our understanding of the giftgiving process. The ethnography will trace and describe the variety of factors which precede, structure and encourage giftgiving. The second goal will be to analyze the texts of the institution's fundraising messages and the contexts in which they are stated. Propp (1977) and other narratologists, who have studied the structure and themes of literary texts, argue that cultural expressions have a specifiable pattern and essential form. If this is true, careful analysis of fundraising messages will suggest the extent to which there are critical and recurring elements in academic appeals.

In order to achieve these two goals, data will be gathered which describe a university's fundraising programs and which consider their relationship to the

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Propp, Vladimir. 1977. Morphology of the Folktale. Austin: University of Texas Press.

larger institutional setting. This inquiry will seek answers to the following questions:

Selection of Messages	Who are the principal actors involved in the selection and timing of fundraising messages?
Design of Messages	Who are the principal actors involved with the writing and design of these ideas?
	How do the written and oral messages vary depending upon the audience to whom they are addressed?
Expression of Messages	What messages are sent in written form? What messages are presented orally? Who delivers the oral messages and how are these messages presented? What role do volunteers play in this communication process? How are fundraising staff and volunteers trained to communicate their messages?

For purposes of our panel discussion, I will present three hypotheses about institutions of higher education. These are hypotheses that are supported by my research at a private research university. Second, I will examine several fundraising texts in order to demonstrate the bases for these hypotheses.

Hypothesis One	Colleges and universities are complex organizations whose behavior and purpose can be more fully understood if we think of them as organizations with a distinct and active cultural life.
Hypothesis Two	Successful academic fundraising programs are as much social and cultural transactions as they are economic transactions.
Hypothesis Three	The texts or messages that the development office creates and sends to individuals seek to create and maintain a sense of affiliation with the institution and a sense of responsibility for the institution's survival.

Andrew Masland's presentation today speaks to the first hypothesis. Because our time is limited, I will briefly consider the second and third hypotheses. How does an institution establish a gift relationship? How does it create an environment that makes individuals feel positively affiliated with and responsible for the institution?

In brief, the answer to these questions is that the college or university communicates on a regular basis and as personally as possible to members of its larger institutional family. Fundraising messages are created and sent through several kinds of media and at particular times. First, the institution may communicate with written materials that are mailed to prospective donors. Second, messages may be relayed through telephone conversations. Third, meetings, often visits to campus, are carefully orchestrated with prospective donors' particular academic interests in mind. Fourth, events such as reunions, auctions, or seminars are planned at which the academic and fundraising needs of the institution are clearly expressed. Thus members of the institutional family may receive a multitude of these messages each year. A recent alumnus of Stanford, for example, could receive up to five written solicitation letters, one or two phone call solicitations, as well as several invitations to young alumni events. Donors deemed to have the greatest gift potential are approached only when and how it is considered appropriate and most efficacious. Thus at the other extreme, a prospective donor may be approached once in the span of several years or even a decade. As much as possible, consideration of the donor's wishes and position is given.

The central focus for my textual analyses has been the General Appeal Program's communications. This program is one of three annual solicitation programs for alumni, parents and friends of Stanford University. In contrast to the two other annual giving programs, where truly individualized attention

is paid to a potential donor, the General Appeal Program addresses the largest number of Stanford prospects, and it addresses them based on market segmentation principles. This means that members of the prospect population receive communications depending upon characteristics such as:

- The school from which he or she graduated.
- The year of graduation.
- The level of his or her giving - such as zero to fifty or one hundred to two hundred and fifty dollars.
- The status of giving - is the prospect a regular, irregular or non-donor?
- Where the potential donor lives - East coast, southern California,....
- Their professional and career interests.

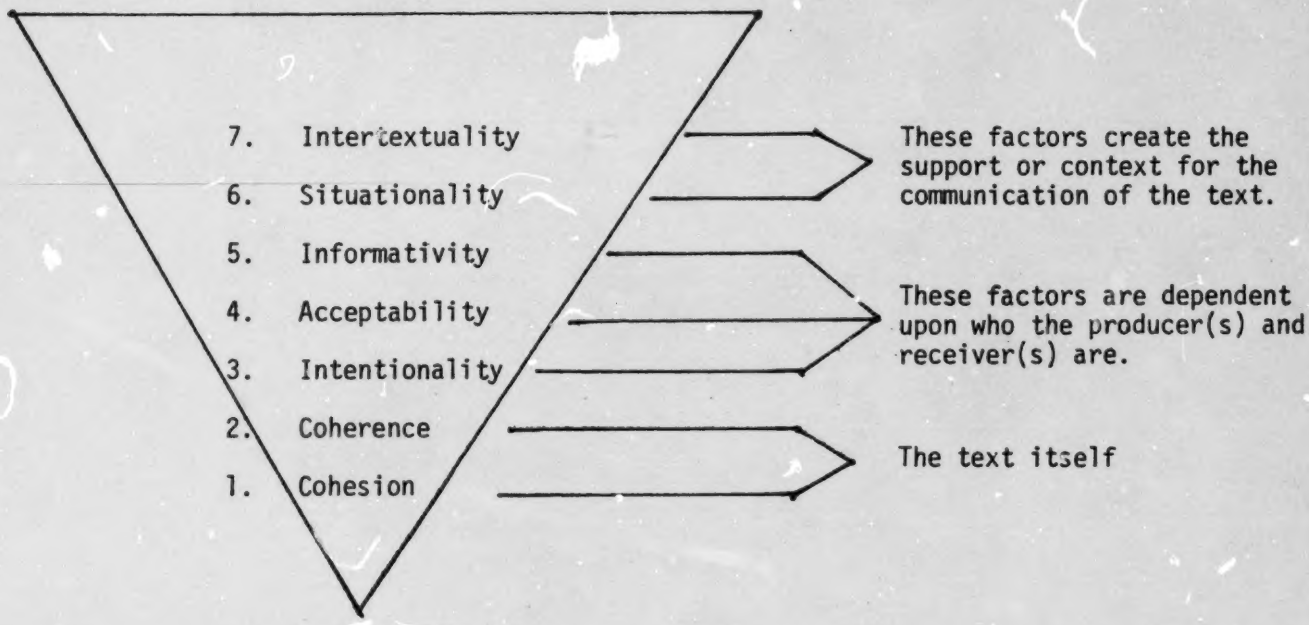
Thus, donors and potential donors who can be expected to donate between one and five hundred dollars per year receive some combination of written and oral solicitation. The texts of these solicitations vary depending upon who and where the potential donor is.

Framework for the Analysis of Texts

Before we look at several General Appeal Program solicitations, let me present a framework. The research techniques developed by ethnographers of communication provide a means for us to analyze the layers of this communication process. Like other anthropologists, ethnographers of communication are interested in describing a culture as it is experienced by the people of that culture. Because it is difficult to get a complete and reasonably accurate picture of a complex cultural community, ethnographers of communication focus their attention on one aspect of that culture. They are interested in describing

the shared means by which members of a community communicate. These ethnographers look at language as it interacts with other aspects of the culture.

In her teaching at Stanford, Professor Shirley Heath outlined an analytical scheme used by ethnographers of communication to observe the progressive layerings of a text. The reader of a written text, or the listener in cases where texts are presented orally, responds to the messages depending upon the extent to which the message is (1) cohesive, (2) coherent, (3) depending upon the intention and (4) acceptability of that message, (5) its informativity, (6) the surrounding situation, and finally (7) depending upon the intertextuality of the message.


7. Intertextuality
6. Situationality
5. Informativity
4. Acceptability
3. Intentionality
2. Coherence
1. Cohesion
These factors create the support or context for the communication of the text.
These factors are dependent upon who the producer(s) and receiver(s) are.
The text itself

The cohesion of the text has to do with how components or elements of the text hold together. For example, is the text cohesive from a grammatical and syntactical point of view? Second, to what extent does the text itself make sense? At these first two levels one looks at the text by itself.

Third, is the intention of the text clear; is the purpose of this text evident? Fourth, is the statement reasonable and appropriate? At this level of text analysis, a consideration of who is presenting the text and who is receiving the text is studied. On the fifth level of analysis one would ask to what extent does the text provide information of value to the receiver? Sixth, what is the nature of the environment in which the text is presented? One might ask, who is speaking, and in what kind of physical setting is the audience being addressed? This constitutes the situation within which the text is presented. Finally, what is the relation of this text to other texts, ones preceding or to follow? To what degree, then, is there intertextuality? Using this seven-step process, a structural analysis of academic fundraising messages can be made, the result of which will be a taxonomy of the basic and recurring elements of a general appeals program.

Annual Fund Texts To Be Reviewed

1. The 1982 Volunteer Conference Invitation
2. General Appeal Program Mailing #1 - an institutional or umbrella mailing
3. Fall Phone Appeal Script
4. General Appeal Program Mailing #2 - a professional school mailing
5. Engineering Alumni Conference - the invitation, School publications and the script of tributes to outstanding volunteers.
6. General Appeal Program Mailing #3 - an institutional or umbrella mailing, "The Check You're Proud to Write."

Conclusion

What these texts clearly reveal is that alumni, parents and friends of an academic institution are considered responsible, dues-paying members of the academic family. Totemism or the belief in kinship through a common affiliation does indeed operate in the academic community. The language and images we looked at are integral, recognizable parts of the institution's culture, and they are presented in texts in order to help the institution survive. Members of the academic family, those we might call the baptised, are called upon to give time and funds to help perpetuate the life of the institution.